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ABSTRACT

A study hypothesized that there was a general tendency among parents for less positive evaluation of their school or school district than is forthcoming from teachers. Using a revised version of Oaster's Parent and Teacher Attitude Scales, data were collected from 35 teachers and 35 parents in an inner-city elementary school. Opinions were sought on the school's programs, facilities, and personnel. With only one school as the referent, results did not support those reported in a previous study. Subsequent data were collected from one elementary and one secondary school in a second school district; the school and district were suburban to the city in which initial data were collected. Data collected for this study presented the conclusion that parents generally provide less positive evaluations of school programs, facilities, and personnel than teachers provide. Tables appended to this paper present statistical data resulting from analysis of responses to the two studies. (JD)

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Are Differences Guaranteed in "Teachers versus the Public"?

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"Principals say their high schools are improving but the public disagrees" and "Teaching creation: Still at odds" are just two of the frequent, incendiary headlines that announce public perceptions and emphasize how these perceptions differ from those held by school personnel (Kansas City Times, 1981; Kansas City Star 1982). This genre of headline is frequently assumed, at times implicitly, to be truly reflective of the public's side of issues like those addressed by the sessions organized for this meeting. One of these issues is the question of how public expectations of teachers are different from teachers' expectations. It is true that educational researchers debate the theoretical and practical value of attitudinal research (Oaster, 1981), but few school officials can afford the luxury of ignoring parents' attitudes and public expectations. Yet, it is unlikely that the local newspaper is a valid source of information to redress expectations of the public or of school personnel.

Duea and Bishop (1980) found definite disparity between school superintendents' and the public's views of major problems for the public schools. Other professional literature suggests essential differences may exist between teachers' and parents' notions of teaching (Taylor, Pickert & Chase, 1978) and educational goals (McTeer, Blanton & Spivey, 1978). Initially, methods employed in an earlier study (Oaster, Benson & MacRae, 1979) rendered unexpected differences between teacher and parent evaluations of school programs facilities and personnel in the present study. Oaster, et al. (1979) suggested that teachers' more positive evaluations were related to their better knowledge of

district conditions. This explanation does not imply that teachers' evaluative responses will always be more positive than parents. In fact, as already indicated, with a single school as the referent, results from the first school district in the present study did not support those reported by Oaster, et al. (1979) with a school district as the attitudinal referent. That is, when asked about the programs, facilities and personnel in one school within a district, in the present study, teachers did not provide more positive responses. For exploratory purposes, data were collected in a second school district focusing both upon a specific school within that district and upon the district itself. In this way, two groups of teachers and two groups of parents provided perceptions concerning their school or their district.

The hypothesis of interest is that there may be a general tendency among parents for less positive evaluative reactions to their school or school district than are forthcoming from teachers. Such a circumstance would have serious consequences for understanding the conditions under which teachers practice their profession.

METHOD AND RESULTS

Initially, data were collected according to Oaster, et al. (1979) with a revised version of their Parent and Teacher Attitude Scales (PTAs). Data were collected from 35 teachers in an inner-city, elementary school in a large midwestern city, and from 35 parents who returned PTAs sent home from the elementary school with their children. Over 95% of the school's enrollment is black.

The original PTAs item stems were stated so as to refer to the specific school under study. And, respondents were provided a 5-point Likert response format (Oaster, et al. had used a rudimentary Agree-Disagree format). One item from each of the three subscales of the PTAs, Programs, Facilities and Personnel, is reproduced in Appendix A. For each respondent three subscale scores were computed by summing their responses employing the customary 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Agree Strongly" through 3 "Neither Agree

nor Disagree" to 5 "Disagree Strongly." After reversals for scoring, high scores are treated as being indicative of positive attitudes toward the referent.

Table 1 contains mean Programs, Facilities and Personnel subscale scores for parents and teachers with standard deviations, standard errors of the mean and t values for group comparisons (teachers vs parents) on each subscale. Parents scored significantly higher on the Programs subscale ($t = -4.0$, $df = 68$, $p < .05$). Subsequent data were collected because of disagreement between data reported above and those reported by Oaster, et al., (1979).

Teachers from one elementary and one secondary school in a second school district and parents of all children in attendance at the elementary school had the opportunity to respond to either Form A (School) or Form B (District) of the Parent and Teacher Attitude Scales (PTAs) used to collect the data reported above. One of the two forms of the PTAs was given to everyother child in attendance on the day of the study to be taken home and returned after completion by a parent. The school and district were suburban to the large midwestern city in which initial data were collected. Fourteen of 18 elementary teachers and 26 of 36 secondary teachers completed the PTAs. And, 89 (of 177 possible) parent PTAs were returned by student messengers. Of the 89 parent PTAs completed, 51 were Form A referring to the specific school and 38 were Form B referring to the district.

Tables 2 through 4 contain mean scores, standard deviations and standard errors of the mean for each subscale by group. Overall and multiple comparison tests provided in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent, 1975) were used for analytic purposes. In Tables 5

through 7, analysis of subscale scores with the one way analysis of variance procedure are presented. These results are summarized in terms of absolute differences among group means noting statistically significant differences when detected with the LSD Procedure.

All comparisons of mean subscale scores for teachers and parents who responded to Form A resulted in statistically significant differences with teachers expressing higher (more positive) attitude scores ($p < .05$). For Form B teachers expressed higher (more positive) attitude scores on the Facilities subscale ($p < .05$) non-significantly higher scores on the Programs subscale and non-significantly lower scores on the Personnel subscale. For this second school district teachers tended to express more positive evaluative responses especially with a specific school (Form A) as the referent.

DISCUSSION

Initial data collected for this study prevent a straight forward conclusion that parents generally provide less positive evaluations of school programs, facilities and personnel than teachers provide. However, a preponderance of evidence here and in the earlier study by Oaster, et al. (1979) tentatively points in that direction. More data are needed before a firm generalization is feasible.

A generalized tendency to undercut teachers' evaluations would create "come from behind" conditions for teachers. That is, if parental attitudes generally lag behind teacher attitudes an appearance of unsatisfied expectations may exist under the most positive conditions. As indicated earlier, popular media sources are willing to exacerbate any differences between public expectations and those of our teachers. Should artifactual differences become the center of public debate, then the ensuing conditions under which teachers must function are not only negative but are arbitrary as well.

Related studies should address themselves to the reliability of generally less positive attitudes among parents. Also of interest would be the perceptions of citizens who are neither parent nor teacher, but who have received a public or parochial education.

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The Kansas City Star. Teaching creation: Still at odds. Sunday, January 10, 1982, p. 17A.

TABLE 1

Mean Programs, Facilities and Personnel subscale scores for parents (N=35) and teachers (N=35) on Form A with standard deviations, standard errors of the mean and t values for group camparisons on each subscale.

Subscale	Group	$\bar{X}$	SD	SEM	t	p
Programs	Teacher	43.37	6.76	1.14	-4.00	0.000
	Parent	50.40	7.88	1.33		
Facilities	Teacher	40.20	7.01	1.18	-1.19	0.238
	Parent	42.14	6.63	1.12		
Personnel	Teacher	49,57	7.48	1.26	-1.16	0.248
	Parent	51.63	7.29	1.23		

TABLE 2

Mean Program subscale scores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B with group N's, standard deviations and standard errors of the mean.

Form	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SEM
A	Teacher	14	56.43	4.45	1.19
A	Parent	51	52.33	5.21	.73
B	Teacher	26	51.62	4.82	.95
B	Parent	38	50.60	4.88	.79
Total		129	52.12	5.18	.46

TABLE 3

Mean Facilities subscale scores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B with group N's, standard deviations and standard errors of the mean.

Form	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SEM
A	Teacher	14	50.21	4.58	1.22
A	Parent	51	46.06	3.84	.54
B	Teacher	26	48.50	4.74	.93
B	Parent	38	44.42	8.68	1.41
Total		129	46.52	6.14	.54

TABLE 4

Mean Personnel subscale scores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B with group N's standard deviations and standard errors of the mean.

Form	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SEM
A	Teacher	14	60.86	4.17	1.11
A	Parent	51	55.35	6.33	.89
B	Teacher	26	53.73	6.60	1.29
B	Parent	38	54.13	6.37	1.03
Total		129	55.26	6.48	.57

TABLE 5

One way analysis of variance with Program subscores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B.

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between groups	3	356.0150	118.6717	4.819	0.0033
Within groups	125	3077.9846	24.6239		
TOTAL	128	3433.9995			

TABLE 6

One way analysis of variance with Facilities subscores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B.

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between groups	3	471.2554	157.0851	4.507	0.0049
Within groups	125	4356.9355	34.8555		
TOTAL	128	4828.1875			

TABLE 7

One way analysis of variance with Personnel subscores for parents and teachers on Forms A and B.

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between groups	3	548.1816	182.7272	4.740	0.0036
Within groups	125	4818.8080	38.5505		
TOTAL	128	5366.9883			

APPENDIX A

PROGRAMS	AGREE STRONGLY		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE		DISAGREE STRONGLY
6. Too much money is spent on athletics within PCSD.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The Physical Education program is adequate for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
FACILITIES					
2. PCSD is not adequately equipped to service the disabled student.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel PCSD is pleasing to the eye.	1	2	3	4	5
PERSONNEL					
6. School administrators in PCSD are sensitive to the needs of their teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
7. A teacher should not get involved in teaching controversial subjects as some teachers now do.	1	2	3	4	5